

SKILLS DEVELOPMENT OF LITHUANIAN POLICE OFFICERS AT SPORTS EVENTS

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Received March 2020; Accepted April 2020

Abstract

Purpose – the goal of this article is to determine how police sports events enable the officers to develop their necessary skills.

Design/methodology/approach – a quantitative analysis of empirical data was carried out.

The method of the research – a questionnaire-based survey and statistical analysis. The generalized results of the research were presented in two tables.

Findings – Police sports events are one of the most unconventional means for officers to develop certain skills and competences. Upon analyzing officers' skill development through sports events based on gender aspect, statistically significant differences were not detected. However, education and age influenced the development of the skills among certain officials. Officials with higher education had the highest preference for access to skills development through sports competitions. From an age perspective, senior officials underestimated the ability to develop skills of selfless behavior and critical thinking through sports events, while developing skills of communication and cooperation as well as ability of quick decision-making were indicated as important among junior officers.

Research limitations/implications – the research was conducted in 2019 and was based on the sports events of police officers carried out in 2018. Performance of multiple studies of such nature could lead to a more detailed conclusions and suggestions based on the results obtained. Due to this limitation, we can only evaluate the insights of the research as first time statements regarding the skills development of police officers at sports events.

Practical implications – the results of this research could benefit the highest police administration. It could lead to their decisions to enhance the importance of sport events in strengthening the development of professional skills of police officers.

Originality/Value – based on the results of the research, the authors were able to discuss the necessary skills that need to be developed for police officers. At the same time, the significance of sports event in society was broadened and its more extensive applicability was discussed.

Keywords: police officers, sports events, skills

Research type: original research.

JEL classification: J24, J45, L83.

Introduction

The police, in accordance with laws and regulations, carry out police tasks and unconditionally defend freedom of individuals, democracy and human rights. Police activities are based on the principles of professional ethics, respect for human rights, humanism, public morality, legitimacy, political neutrality, openness and confidentiality of activities, service subordination, as well as the use of force only as necessity and the proportionality of such necessity (Lietuvos Respublikos policijos įstatymas, 2000). A police officer is a statutory civil servant who performs statutory police functions that ensure the implementation of police tasks and functions. The profession of police officer belongs to the group of high-risk specialties, therefore physical and psychological training are the necessary conditions for the preparation of officers as well as for maintaining a state of constant readiness (Muliarčikas et al. 2004). The purpose of professional training of officers is to develop their physical characteristics, motor skills, abilities to make the right decisions, to allocate the right resources and to choose the right tools, skills, competences and attitudes. Generally police officers take part in qualification development courses, exercises, lectures and sports or applied competitions.

It could be argued that police and sports activities are complementary. Proper physical and vocational training is closely linked to the pursue of career in the police system. Officials engaged in the selection process for the position of higher statutory civil servants, among others must meet physical fitness and additional requirements related to physical and practical abilities. Sports events of Lithuanian police are not only a form of active leisure time that promotes physical abilities, but also an opportunity to develop certain skills.

Both foreign (Mulder, 2007; Roufa, 2017) and Lithuanian researchers (Smalskys, 2008; Pukelis, 2009; Vitkauskas, 2011; Navickienė, 2011; Skibarka, Navickienė 2012) studied personnel training, qualification development, competence development and skills development of police. However, their research focused more on traditional educational approaches and officer training paradigms. Additionally, studies have mostly described events for professional development and analyzed the documents of police competence development.

There is a lack of constructive approach towards dealing with individual police competences with regard to issues related to the professional development and skills development of police officers. There is a need for comprehensive research to substantiate the effectiveness of the police officers' training process (Navickienė, 2011). The purpose of this article is to determine how police sports events enable the officer to develop his/her necessary skills.

1. Theoretical background

1.1. Competences and skills development of police officers

Competence is referred to as a scope of activity or phenomenon in which a person is very familiar and capable of properly performing a required task. Competence is defined as the ability of person to perform certain activities based on knowledge, skills, habits and values. As a result, a competency would refer to person's efficiency and quality in performing certain activity, also, his/her ability to use certain competences or qualifications in practice (Adomaitienė, Teresevičienė, 2001; Pečiuliauskienė, Barkauskaitė, 2011). As can be seen, competence is inseparable from qualification. A set of certain knowledge, skills, abilities, and experience that a person can acquire qualitatively (competently) to work in the relevant type and ability is defined as qualification (Kvieskienė, 2003; Lustri et al. 2007).

Contemporary public administration is an extremely complex system of resource allocation, which operates in an ever-changing environment. Thus, management must adapt and with appropriate flexibility address the most complex issues. New concept of public sector management, based on the idea of modernization, emphasizes the importance of professionalism of various profile specialists in the realization of public sector functions (Tubutienė, Bajarūnienė, 2008).

Development of statutory civil servants' training, general and professional competences and upgrading of qualifications became especially important after Lithuania's accession to the European Union and joining the Schengen area. The selection of optimal directions of police training and professional development became necessary (Vitkauskas, 2011; Skibarka, Veršinskas, 2012). Like other statutory staff, police officers must possess a wide range of experience, knowledge and attitudes (Survey on European police education and training, 2006).

The importance of generic competences (personal, social, managerial) for the performance of statutory tasks is constantly analyzed (Smalskys, 2008; Tubutienė, Bajarūnienė, 2008; Zubrickienė, Adomėnaitė 2016). General competences are a combination of long-standing knowledge, skills, attitudes and values that contribute to professional flexibility, adaptation and multiple personal development. Statutory civil servants, like other civil servants, must have abstract, technical and cognitive abilities. The Code of Ethics for Police Officers emphasizes that an officer must be humane, truthful, impartial and respectful of the homeland and its citizens. He/she must also be able to think critically and strategically, and be able to cooperate with various individuals or institutions as well as be able to resolve conflict situations (Dėl Lietuvos policijos darbuotojų etikos kodekso patvirtinimo, 2018). The Police Officer Training Standard (Policininko rengimo standartas, 2008) provides the officer with the necessary key competences, such as loyalty to the profession, reliability, duty, integrity, initiative, constant desire to improve, stress management, language skills,

objectivity and responsibility. It is recognized that officers can ensure the security of the state and individuals only if they have the appropriate capacities to identify human actions and can analyze the environment and understand the essence of the police organization.

According to Daršukvienė and others (2008), employees of the organization, their knowledge and skills, become a major competitive advantage because they rely on the exceptional competencies of their managers. Therefore, there is a need for organizations and companies to develop professional competency models that reflect the professional competences required by employees.

The police has approved a description (model) of competences of police officers and other employees of police system, which regulates the competences and expected results of criminal, public police, administrative and executive officers, as well as other employees of police system. This description distinguishes three types of competences specific to police officers: professional competences, special competences and complementary special competences (Dėl policijos pareigūnų ir kitų policijos sistemos darbuotojų kompetencijų aprašo patvirtinimo, 2012).

The Police Training Standard (Policininko rengimo standartas, 2008) identifies three areas of professional competence: public safety and public order; social assistance needed for the prevention of criminal offenses and administrative disorders; prevention of law infractions and investigation of administrative and criminal violations. As can be seen, professional competences of police officers are diverse requiring specific knowledge, skills and values. All of this consists of knowing the law, being able to apply the law, as well as having sufficient knowledge on how to administer, prevent and prevent different types of misconduct. Additionally, officials must be aware of human rights and freedoms. Statutory officials are distinguished from other civil servants or individuals by the fact that citizens are subordinate to them. In this case, officials have a special right to demand certain orders, and if legal requirements are not met, physical and psychological enforcement can be used (Vitkauskas, 2012). Therefore, officers develop competences in areas such as personal psychology, professional tactic and the use of special measurements.

1.2. Sports events as a means of training of police officers

Sports event is usually a public event that promotes a physical activity or is designed for competition for excellence. Police sport is a specialized form of sport that implements special physical fitness to maintain public order and ensure the safety of citizens. The prevailing sports are: running, swimming, riding, self-defense, sports games.

Sporting activities intended to improve officials' physical or professional fitness must be organized in accordance with an approved procedure, timetable or schedule of sporting activities of the statutory body in which they are employed. Such officials' physical fitness checks must also

comply with the internal rules of the facility (Vidaus tarnybos sistemos pareigūnų fizinio pasirengimo reikalavimai ir atitiktis šiems reikalavimams tikrinimo tvarkos aprašas, 2019).

The description of the procedure for planning, organizing, conducting, financing and selecting, sending and participating in international police and other sports events for the Lithuanian police sports competitions and other sports events was approved in 2013. The police authorities must facilitate physical activities and sports of the officers and employees of the establishments and ensure the participation of the employees in competitions. Officials must meet physical fitness and additional requirements that can be achieved not only during exercise but also during sporting events, which means that policemen can develop a variety of skills through competitions in different sports (Bataitytė et al, 2011; Coalter, 2005; Veršinskas, Gaidelis, 2012).

Police competition is a competition between two or more police athletes or teams according to pre-announced regulations and in accordance with the rules set by the appropriate sports federation. Annual sports competitions among police authorities are cumulated in general standings. The police have clearly defined priority (international) and non-priority (international) sporting events. Sports events that are included in the calendar of events of the European Police Sports Union are considered as priority (international), while sports events not included in the previously mentioned calendar, as well as event organized by other international police organizations and associations are considered as non-priority.

Only officers who have undergone a health examination and are qualified for a particular sport may participate in sports events. The delegations of officials that are sent to sports events are formed based on the results achieved during police events, while in the absence of such type of competition, special events or sports camps may be organized to identify appropriate candidates.

In 2018 the goal of Lithuanian police sports events was to improve the professional training of police officers, to continue the established police sports tradition, to popularize police-related and other sports among its employees, to identify the best athletes who could represent the Lithuanian police in international and other events. 20 events were planned to organize in 2018. Among those, one event was international, while two events were organized jointly with other institutions– the Customs Department and the Lithuanian Armed Forces. However, over the course of the year, about 10 additional events were organized by other institutions, in which police officers could participated, previously selected in accordance to the criteria mentioned above.

Sports events of the Lithuanian Police maintain or develop the physical and professional preparation of officers, and develop their professional skills – the use of shooting and handling of a service weapon, the use of physical and mental coercion, knowledge of professional tactics. It is worth mentioning that sports are not meant to prepare officers for the standards of physical and additional requirements or to function in extreme situations, but it is rather a useful tool for

developing other abilities (Standards for police training, 2017). Participation in sports competitions helps to develop general competences: personal, social, managerial and intercultural. It is widely agreed that necessary skills, such as communication and collaboration, interpersonal and intergroup conflict resolution, assistance, ability to work in groups or alone, stress management, quick decision making, selflessness, friendliness, responsibility, impartiality, activity planning and organization, decency and restraint, critical and strategic thinking or tolerance are developed during competitions and during preparation for competitions. The organization of international sporting events contributes to diversity and broadens the horizons of police officers and raises competitiveness, which encourages officers to develop and expand their competences. It also develops the ability to work or act on an inter-institutional level, and increases the potential for collaboration.

In summary it could be stated that the organization of sports events in the Lithuanian Police is indeed structured and carefully planned. During sports events, officials have the opportunity to practice and improve their professional qualifications.

2. Research methods

A questionnaire survey was conducted in order to analyze police officers' ability to develop their skills at sports events. 692 different police officers attended police sports events in 2018. According to Paniot's formula, the representative sample size of entire population was 247 respondents, while 253 respondents participated in the study.

The questionnaire survey was conducted electronically in February-March of 2019. The survey aimed at finding out what professional skills respondents of various demographic groups (gender, education, age) developed while participating in sports events. For each statement in the questionnaire, subjects were asked to choose the most appropriate answer in descending order of scale: "Strongly agree", "Agree", "Neither agree nor disagree", "Disagree" and "Strongly disagree".

Cronbach's alpha coefficient (α) was calculated in order to determinate the internal compatibility and validity of the questionnaire. Statistical analysis of the collected data was performed using SPSS Statistics 17.0 software package. The Kolmogorov-Smirnov test ($p < 0.05$) found that the sample data were non-parametric. Analyzing the data, the rank answers "Strongly agree" with "Agree" and "Disagree" with "Strongly disagree" were combined and the age and seniority groups of respondents were formed.

Kruskal-Wallis criterion was used (calculated X^2 - chi square, df - degree of freedom, p - significance level) for the analysis of nonparametric data. The Mann-Whitney criterion was used to determine the difference between the two groups (U = baseline, z = statistical significance, p = significance level). Significance levels of $p < 0.05$ indicated a statistically significant difference in the statement.

3. Research results and analysis

Evaluating the sources of information that police officers access in order to find out about sports events suggested that the most common ones were instructor, a document management system (DVS), or a colleague. However, the information published by the Lithuanian Police on its facebook page was more significant for women than for men. Older officials (40-49) were more likely to access sports information through DVS. Officials with higher education degree were more likely to follow a sports event plan than other officials, while officials with vocational education relied more on the knowledge of their colleagues.

Respondents were asked to rate nineteen skills that were developed through participation in sports events. The least favorably (totally agree and agree) rated were the *ability to apply knowledge in practice* (67.8%), *professional tactics* (68.9%), *interpersonal and intergroup conflict resolution* (70%) and *delivery of assistance* (72.8%). Officials gave the highest marks to the *ability to shoot and handle service weapons* (85.5%), *communication and cooperation* (82.8%), *friendly communication* (81.6%) and *accountability* (81.1%).

No statistically significant differences were found during the analysis of respondents' answers from a **gender** perspective. The survey results showed that men slightly higher than women ranked the value of *shooting and dealing with service weapons*, the *use of physical force* and *physical fitness training* at sports events. However, women appreciated *professional tactics*, *delivery of assistance* and *stress management* more than men. Almost identically, all officers valued the *ability to treat others fairly*. It is important to note that female officers were more critical when it came to assessing the benefits of sports events and developing skills.

The answers of the respondents on the development of four competences (out of the 19 assessed) from the perspective of **education** were statistically significant. The results of the survey showed that for the absolute majority of graduates (91.8%) from higher education institutions, sports events were a means of maintaining *physical fitness*. While only 51.2 percent of the respondents who had a vocational training 67.9 percent of the respondents who had a professional training agreed with such statement (Fig. 37). Significant differences were found between officials with higher, professional and vocational education ($p = 0.000$) (Tab.1). Thus, it can be argued that business skills were more important for officials with higher education.

General competence, *communication and cooperation* were of the least importance to respondents with higher education (59.5% positive responses). However, those with higher education (91.7%) strongly believed that sport helped them develop this ability. There was a statistically significant difference ($p = 0.000$; $p = 0.006$) between respondents with higher education, professional and vocational education.

The results of the research showed that the higher the education, the more the skills of *friendly communication in the work environment* were developed during sports events. 90.3% of the respondents with higher education fully agreed and agreed with such statement. In comparison, 71.4 per cent of the respondents with professional education and 67.2 percent of the respondents with vocational training agreed to the same statement. There was a statistically significant difference between the answers of officials with higher, professional and vocational education ($p = 0.002$, $p = 0.000$).

A statement that sports events developed a *sense of responsibility* provided various responses among different education groups of respondents. Officials with higher education (87.6%) provided highest marks for *responsibility* development, followed by vocational education (73.7%) and professional (69.0%). Percentage frequency results are also supported by statistically significant differences ($p = 0.005$, $p = 0.014$) between the individual groups: higher and professional, higher and vocational.

Table 1. Evaluation of skills development based on respondents' education (percentage frequency)

Skills	Education	Strongly agree and agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Strongly disagree or disagree	Difference
Physical preparation	*Higher	91,8	6,8	1,4	$X^2 = 38,229, (df = 4), p = 0,000$ * U = 1781,00, Z = -6,053, p = 0,000, * U = 3110,00, Z = -4,262, p = 0,000.
	*Professional	51,2	41,5	7,3	
	*Vocational	67,9	26,8	5,4	
	Professional	54,8	26,2	19,0	
	Vocational	69,0	22,4	8,6	
Communication and cooperation	* Higher	91,7	6,2	2,1	$X^2 = 25,323, (df = 4), p = 0,00$ * U = 2460,00, Z = -5,048, p = 0,000, * U = 3589,500, Z = -2,731, p = 0,006.
	* Professional	59,5	28,6	11,9	
	* Vocational	77,6	17,2	5,2	
	Professional	69,0	23,8	7,2	
	Vocational	67,1	24,2	8,7	
Friendly communication in work environment	* Higher	90,3	8,3	1,4	$X^2 = 20,666, (df = 4), p = 0,000$ * U = 2460,00, Z = -3,155, p = 0,002, * U = 3203,500, Z = -4,132, p = 0,000.
	* Professional	71,4	21,4	7,2	
	* Vocational	67,2	20,7	12,1	
Responsibility	* Higher	87,6	10,3	2,1	$X^2 = 12,680, (df = 4), p = 0,013$ * U = 2491,00, Z = -2,779, p = 0,005, * U = 3544,500, Z = -2,449, p = 0,014
	* Professional	69,0	28,6	2,4	
	* Vocational	73,7	19,3	7,0	
	Professional	76,2	21,4	2,4	
	Vocational	73,7	21,1	5,3	

Source: according to research data

To summarize, it could be stated that the aspirations to maintain good physical well-being were highest among the respondents with **higher education**. Significant differences were found between the respondents with higher education, professional and vocational education. Officials with higher education were more likely than others to value the effectiveness of sports events in

maintaining a personal well-being. Such officials were also more appreciative of the opportunity to interact with colleagues in an informal setting, which was likely to provide an opportunity to address existing problems in an informal setting. The ability to communicate and collaborate was of the least importance to the respondents with professional education, while respondents with higher education believed that sports events helped to develop such ability. The results of the study showed that the higher the education, the more it was possible to develop friendly communication skills during sports events. In addition, sports events help develop a sense of responsibility, but this characteristic was mostly common for the respondents with higher education.

The responses on seven skills (out of the 19 submitted for assessment) of police officers were statistically significant with regard to respondents' **age**. This appeared to be an important criterion that influenced officers' perceptions of the development of *professional tactics*. The results of the survey showed that the older the officer, the less he/she appreciated the opportunities to develop *professional tactics* in sports competitions. This statement was strongly agreed and agreed by 19-29 year-old officials – 76.2% of all respondents. The responses of 50 year-old or older officials were distributed almost proportionally among the three response categories. The statistically significant difference was: $p = 0.002$, $p = 0.014$) (Table 2).

Development of *communication and cooperation skills* through sports events was particularly important for the younger age group, but least important for the senior age group. The primary test showed that there was a significant difference ($p = 0.003$) between the responses, while the secondary test revealed that the difference was between 50 year-old and older, 20-29 year-old, 30-39 year-old and 40-49 year-old officers. Accordingly, the differences between the age groups were as follows: $p = 0.000$, $p = 0.004$, $p = 0.011$.

Officials agreed that police sports events could develop *interpersonal and intergroup conflict resolution* skills. However, the results of the study showed that with increasing age this ability was increasingly underestimated. This was proved by 77.8% of the respondents in age group of 20-29 year-old indicating strong agreement or agreement, while, on contrary, only 38.1 percent of their colleagues in age group of 50 year-old or older claimed so. Statistically significant difference ($p = 0.016$) was calculated as well. In addition, there was a significant difference between age groups 50 years or older with: 19-29 year-olds, 30-39 year-olds and 40-49 year-olds.

The youngest officials (81.3%) agreed that the ability to *deliver assistance* could be developed through sports. The same tendency remained throughout research data, which supported the findings that the older the officer, the less this ability was developed. A significant difference was found between age groups 50 years or older with: 19-29 year-olds, 30-39 year-olds and 40-49 year-olds.

Respondents of age groups of 40-49 year-old and 19-20 year old stated that sports event can help to enhance *quick decision-making* skills. The most senior (by age) police officers were the least likely to agree with such statement. Response differences between the oldest group and all others were significant ($p = 0.006$, $p = 0.022$, $p = 0.004$).

A relatively small part of respondents within the age group of 50 year-old or older appreciated the ability to develop *selfless behavior and critical thinking* competences through sports competitions. The results of the study showed that they remained fairly neutral (57.1% and 52.4%). The highest evaluations for the development of *selfless behavior* was provided by the officers of age group of 40-49 year-old, while *critical thinking* competences scored highest among the respondents of age group of 30-39 year-old. There was a significant difference in the assessment of selfless behavior among responses ($p = 0.002$, $p = 0.006$, $p = 0.001$) between the 50 years or older with: 19-29 year-olds, 30-39 year-olds and 40-49 year-olds. And when it came to *critical thinking*, there was a statistically significant difference between 50 years or older with: 19-29 year-olds, 30-39 year-olds and 40-49 year-olds. Accordingly, the differences between the groups were as follows: $p = 0.002$, $p = 0.006$, $p = 0.001$.

Table 2. Evaluation of skills development based on respondents' age (percentage frequency)

Skills	Age (years)	Strongly agree and agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Strongly disagree or disagree	Difference
Professional tactic	19-29	76,2	17,5	6,3	$X^2 = 20,410$, (df = 6), $p = 0,002$ $* U = 351,500$, $Z = -3,552$, $p = 0,000$; $U = 515,00$, $Z = -2,827$, $p = 0,005$; $U = 456,00$, $Z = -3,118$, $p = 0,002$;
	30-39	72,2	11,4	16,5	
	40-49	69,3	24,0	6,7	
	50 or more	35,0	35,0	30	
Communication and cooperation	19-29	90,8	7,7	1,5	$X^2 = 19,492$, (df = 6), $p = 0,003$ $* U = 381,00$, $Z = -4,099$, $p = 0,000$; $U = 562,500$, $Z = -2,888$, $p = 0,004$; $U = 606,00$, $Z = -2,550$, $p = 0,011$;
	30-39	85,5	11,8	2,7	
	40-49	81,7	12,2	6,1	
	50 or more	50,0	35,0	15,0	
Interpersonal and intergroup conflict resolution	19-29	77,8	22,2	0	$X^2 = 15,657$, (df = 6), $p = 0,016$ $* U = 378,00$, $Z = -3,593$, $p = 0,000$; $U = 533,500$, $Z = -2,924$, $p = 0,003$; $U = 483,500$, $Z = -3,464$, $p = 0,001$;
	30-39	73,1	20,5	6,4	
	40-49	68,9	24,3	6,8	
	50 or more	38,1	47,6	14,3	
Delivery of assistance	19-29	81,3	17,2	1,5	$X^2 = 3,134$, (df = 6), $p = 0,041$ $* U = 408,00$, $Z = -3,429$, $p = 0,001$; $U = 574,00$, $Z = -2,732$, $p = 0,006$; $U = 558,00$, $Z = -2,254$, $p = 0,024$;
	30-39	75,0	20,0	5,0	
	40-49	71,2	21,9	6,9	
	50 or more	42,9	47,6	9,5	
Quick decision-making	19-29	84,6	13,8	1,6	$X^2 = 15,830$, (df = 6), $p = 0,015$ $* U = 484,500$, $Z = -2,755$, $p = 0,006$; $U = 649,500$, $Z = -2,288$, $p = 0,022$; $U = 522,00$, $Z = -2,843$, $p = 0,004$;
	30-39	79,3	19,5	1,2	
	40-49	85,1	12,2	2,7	
	50 or more	57,1	28,6	14,3	
Selfless behavior	19-29	78,5	16,9	4,6	$X^2 = 25,465$, (df = 6), $p = 0,000$ $* U = 429,500$, $Z = -2,978$, $p = 0,003$; $U = 451,500$, $Z = -3,866$, $p = 0,000$; $U = 366,00$, $Z = -4,654$, $p = 0,000$;
	30-39	73,8	22,5	3,8	
	40-49	81,3	16,0	2,7	
	50 or more	28,6	57,1	14,3	

Table 2 continues on the next page

Continuation of Table 2

Skills	Age (years)	Strongly agree and agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Strongly disagree or disagree	Difference
Critical thinking	19-29	77,8	20,6	1,6	$X^2 = 13,806$, (df = 6), $p = 0,032$ * $U = 466,00$, $Z = -3,039$, $p = 0,002$; $U = 572,00$, $Z = -2,766$, $p = 0,006$; $U = 489,500$, $Z = -3,414$, $p = 0,001$;
	30-39	81,3	16,0	2,7	
	40-49	75,0	22,5	2,5	
	50 or more	42,9	52,4	4,8	

Source: according to research data

Summarizing the assessment of survey responses based on the **age** of the respondents, it could be stated that the older the officer, the less he or she sees opportunities to develop skills of *interpersonal and intergroup conflict resolution, delivery of assistance, selfless behavior, and critical thinking*. The development of skills of *communication and cooperation and delivery of assistance* through sports events were particularly important for the respondents of the youngest (19-20 year-old) age group. Officers agreed that police sports events could provide opportunities for the development of interpersonal and intergroup conflict resolution skills, but with increasing age, this ability was being underestimated.

4. Conclusions

Police sports events are one of the most unconventional means for officers to develop certain skills and competences. Sports competitions create emergency situations that are comparable to those experienced while on duty. In order to be successful (able to solve problems), an official must rationally allocate his/her capabilities, concentrate all the necessary skills and competences available, which makes sports events an excellent means for self-education.

Upon analyzing officers' skill development through sports events based on gender aspect, statistically significant differences were not detected. However, education and age influenced the development of the skills among certain officials. Officials with higher education had the highest preference for access to skills development through sports competitions. Physical fitness, communication and cooperation, friendly communication in the work environment and responsibility were the key competences that officials with higher education needed to develop during sports events. From an age perspective, senior officials underestimate the ability to develop skills of selfless behavior and critical thinking through sports events, while developing skills of communication and cooperation as well as ability of quick decision-making were indicated as important among junior officials. The skills for interpersonal and intergroup conflict resolution and delivery of assistance were the most controversial among different age groups of respondents. They were rated low by senior officials and, in contrary, as the highest by young officers.

Thus, it is evident that police sports events are not only means for cultural exchange or sharing of professional experience between police officers. It could also be an important tool for necessary skills development, as well as ground for strategical improvements.

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